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R 090342Z OCT 07
FM AMEMBASSY ASHGABAT
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 9506
INFO RUCNCIS/CIS COLLECTIVE
RUCNMEM/EU MEMBER STATES COLLECTIVE
RUCNCLS/ALL SOUTH AND CENTRAL ASIA COLLECTIVE
RUEATRS/DEPT OF TREASURY WASHDC
RHEBAAA/DEPT OF ENERGY WASHDC
RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING 0672
RUEHAK/AMEMBASSY ANKARA 2851
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO 0548
RUEHIT/AMCONSUL ISTANBUL 1124
RHMFIUU/CDR USCENCOM MACDILL AFB FL
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHDC
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHDC
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHINGTON DC
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC

UNCLAS ASHGABAT 001083

SIPDIS

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SENSITIVE

STATE FOR SCA/CEN, SCA/PPD

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SUBJECT: TURKMENISTAN: STATE MEDIA UNSURE OF ITSELF WHILE THE
PRESIDENT IS AWAY - MEDIA REACTION TO TWO CENTCOM VISITS.

¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY. State media gave minor coverage to the U.S. CENTCOM visit, headed by the Commander of the U.S. Naval Forces Central Command, Vice Admiral Kevin J. Cosgriff, September 27-28. However, it had been believed that the visit would not be covered at all, according to working level state media contacts. A short visit the week before by Lieutenant General R. Steven Whitcomb was entirely ignored, although this was likely at the behest of the Ministry of Defense (MOD). We believe this change from the extensive coverage given recent American visitors reflects confusion in state media's decision making. And during the Cosgriff visit the President and the country's top leadership - and media decisions come from the top - were attending the UN General Assembly in New York. END SUMMARY.

MOD AVOIDS THE SPOTLIGHT DURING WHITCOMB VISIT

¶2. (SBU) Post's Public Affairs Section (PAS) promoted a visit by LTG Whitcomb on September 20 to state media contacts. During the one-day visit Whitcomb toured a U.S.-organized medical training program at Turkmenistan's Central Military Hospital - a visit that would, following recent practice, generate some state media coverage. Unfortunately, the Ministry of Defense chose not to allow state journalists to visit and there was no coverage.

STATE MEDIA TOLD NOT TO COVER COSGRIFF'S VISIT?

¶3. (SBU) PAS again promoted the September 27-28 visit of Vice-Admiral Cosgriff to state media and offered "Watan" TV news an exclusive interview. However, state media contacts reported that they had been instructed not to cover the visit. Given recent positive and extensive coverage of U.S. official visitors, post was surprised. However, on September 27, state "Watan" TV news program aired a short announcement of the delegation's arrival to Turkmenistan. The same day, New York-based "EurasiaNet" (www.eurasianet.org) and Russian news agency "ITAR-TASS" (Russian), including the Russia-based pro-government website "turkmenistan.ru" (English, Russian), carried content similar to the "Watan" TV news broadcast. The following day, state dailies "Neutral Turkmenistan" (Russian, circ. 39,851) and "Turkmenistan" (Turkmen, circ. 29,091)

printed articles with similar content to the "Watan" TV news report.

In the following days, several weeklies (Turkmen) reprinted the article. (NOTE: "Watan" re-broadcasts the same news content 3 times the following day. END NOTE.)

17. (U) COMMENT: In recent weeks, the "Watan" TV news program has provided video coverage of all official delegations to Turkmenistan.

Despite the initial decision not to cover the Cosgriff delegation, state media covered the visit briefly, which we believe reflects confusion in state media's decision making. And during the Cosgriff visit the President and the country's top leadership were attending the UN General Assembly in New York. Thus, state media's increased coverage of U.S. Government delegations and activities reflects clearly a policy decision at the highest levels, rather than a flourishing of media interest in U.S. activity. END COMMENT.

HOAGLAND